MORALITY THEMES IN MILTON'S POETRY

By Robert L. Ramsay

In the issue of *Studies in Philology* devoted last year to essays on the English Renaissance, Professor Hanford [1] has shown in very persuasive fashion how Milton's sympathies with the Renaissance spirit deepened with advancing years, and how, contrary to the commonly received opinion, the inspiration that he derived from its moral, philosophical, and human phases became a steadily increasing factor in his work. With this judgment I find myself in complete agreement; and it is the purpose of this paper to deal with the other factor in Milton's work,—the factor that decreast as the Renaissance influence increast. This complementary influence is, I believe, the medieval. It is an influence that has been strangely little discust in proportion to its significence for Milton's genius. Professor Saintsbury has indeed declared,[2] with rather too sweeping a generalization, that Milton, in comparison with Shakspere and Dante, is strangely unmodern, with little even of the Renaissance about him except certain external tricks and fashions of form; and that the great influences which shaped his work were essentially but three in number,—Biblical, classical, and medieval. And yet it has been the Biblical, the classical, and the Renaissance factors that have hitherto almost monopolized the field of Milton criticism. There are of course certain initial improbabilities, in Milton's date and in his exprest sympathies, which account for this neglect of the medieval side of his multifariously hospitable and catholic genius. But a man may be born with a medieval mind in any age; and just as Chaucer is the most Renaissance-minded of medieval writers, so must Milton be recognized as the most medieval of all the great writers of the Renaissance.

The special medieval connection that I have in mind is with the morality play. I shall try to show that Milton's work, when examined with the old morality plots and characters in mind, reveals a close kinship, closer not only than Shakspere's, but even than

[1] "The Dramatic Element in *Paradise Lost*," *Studies in Philology*, April, 1917.

[2] *Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, vol. VII.

Chaucer's, with that distinctively medieval form. A plausible recent attempt [3] has been made to find in Chaucer a hitherto unsuspected use of one of the chief morality categories, that of the Seven Deadly Sins. The relation which Professor Tupper has discovered seems to me indubitable. But after all it signifies comparatively little for the understanding of Chaucer's art; for there is a conspicuous absence of any inner and vital kinship between the mind of the author of the *Canterbury Tales* and what may be called the morality way of thinking. So dominant in Chaucer's day was the typical medieval passion for viewing the world under abstract categories such as the seven deadly sins that he could not have escaped them, and wherever a plausible case is made out for their underlying presence in his work he is to be presumed guilty until he is proved innocent. But so far as they are present we must recognize in them the voice of the age and not of the man. With Milton the very opposite is true. In Chaucer's case the concepts and methods of the morality were merely part of the atmosphere he breathed. For Milton they were instead part of the very furniture of his mind.

In order to justify this contention, it is desirable, first of all, to define as clearly as we can wherein lies the distinctive character of the medieval morality. The morality is, of course, the dramatic presentation of an allegory. But allegory is far too general a term to differentiate the form. The use of allegory as a dramatic method is almost equally common in all the literary periods, Middle Ages and Renaissance alike. Lyly's *Endimion,* Buckingham's *Rehearsal,* and Hauptmann's *Sunken Bell* are all three allegorical plays, yet they are in no sense moralities. The essence of the morality lies rather in the special kind of allegory that it employs. An allegory, as the term is commonly used, is the expansion of a trope or figure into an extended narrative. The result of the expansion, however, varies substantially with the precise kind of figure that constitutes its starting point. We may usefully classify allegories into expanded metaphors, expanded personifications, and expanded metonymies. The metaphor expanded gives rise to the parable; the personification expanded produces either the fable or the morality; the metonymy expanded results in the emblematic or symbolic narrative. With the last-named we are little con-

[3] F. Tupper, " Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," PMLA. 22. 93 (1914.)

cerned for our present purposes, altho it has become of increasing significance for our later literature. It is, for example, the form preferred by Hawthorne. In the *Scarlet Letter, The House of Seven Gables, Rappacini's Daughter,* or *The Artist of the Beautiful,* we have human, concrete stories, literally true, into each of which there enters some concrete object,—the scarlet A, the birthmark, the poison plant, the mechanical butterfly,—which stands for the central abstract idea of the story and carries in itself the moral meaning of the whole. The connection is clearly one of association rather than resemblance, and hence the underlying trope must be considered a metonymy.

Earlier users of allegory, however, have in general preferred the methods either of the metaphor or of the personification. The two are essentially distinct figures of speech. It is a misleading custom to regard the personification as merely one variety of metaphor. They differ in the vital point of reality. The metaphor compares two objects equally actual, both of which exist independently, altho the mind for the moment confuses or imaginatively blends them; but the personification is concerned with but one object, with which, naively or deliberately, is combined an abstract attribute that does not belong to it, namely, the concept of life or human personality. Whence comes this notion of personality added by the imagination is not necessarily or commonly in the mind at all. Usually, perhaps, it is anthropomorphic, borrowed, that is, from the speaker's own consciousness, which is shared for the moment with the objects he is discussing. But there are never, in simple and unmixt forms of personification, the two distinct objects which are characteristic of metaphor. When the animals speak in a fable they are not identified imaginatively with men. They remain animals which somehow possess the alien attribute of human personality. Of course the process of abstraction is not deliberate; the concept of life or personality is not first consciously extracted and then united with the personified object; but such a process is implicit, and it is radically different from that which is revealed by analysis in a metaphor. The latter is fundamentally real and concrete, the former unreal and abstract in its essence. Now the object personi-fied may itself be real and concrete, *e. g.,* an animal, plant, or element. In this case the result of adding the abstract notion of personality is material for a fable; and the essential fable (altho

in actual literary history other things have occasionally used the name) is an expanded concrete personification. When, on the other hand, the object personified is itself an abstraction, the result is material for a morality play, or an expanded abstract personification in dramatic form. The morality is thus in its nature doubly abstract; it is as it were the square of an abstraction.

It follows as a natural result of this essential difference between the figures that it is never possible to state a personification in a way that is literally true, as can always be done with the genuine metaphor. To illustrate from proverbs, which are so often little condenst allegories: when we say " A burnt child dreads the fire," or " Rome was not built in a day," we have uttered statements of literal truth, but at the same time exprest thru them a second truth. These are metaphors, which might be expanded into parables. But when we say, " Experience is the best teacher," or " Procrastination is the thief of Time," we have made statements with no literal meaning at all, statements with but one meaning, and that the figurative one. These proverbs are personifications, which might be expanded into morality plays.

In the contrast between these two types of allegory is to be found, to no inconsiderable extent, the contrast between the medieval and the Renaissance spirit, as it is reflected in the literature of the two periods. The type of allegory that dominated the Middle Ages was persistently of the unreal and abstract sort,—the fable, the symbol or emblem, and especially the personified abstraction both in dramatic and epic form. The new age brought with it a great impulse toward the concrete; and once more the parable, based on real life, on history, or on nature came to the front. A single example of the contrast may suffice here. In medieval religious drama the Bible parables are strangely neglected. The miracle cycles and the moralities, which between them use up so large a proportion of the Scripture text, omitted these little stories which to modern eyes would seem to offer almost ideal plots for the dramatist. With a few scattering exceptions, even the well-nigh perfect plot of the Prodigal Son is unutilized by medieval playwrights. When they wisht to present that doctrine which, to our minds at least, receives its finest embodiment in the story of the prodigal, the doctrine of the triumph of God's mercy over his justice, they went instead to an obscure verse of the Psalms: " Mercy and Truth

have met together; Righteousness and Peace have kist each other ";
and of this apparently in every way less promising material they
made the enormously popular theme of the Four Daughters of
God, with its extraordinary number of surviving embodiments in
medieval verse and prose, romance and drama. It was not until
the sixteenth century, among the dramatists of Germany and Eng-
land who wrote under Protestant and humanistic influences, that
the parable of the Prodigal Son was taken up and made the theme
of a numerous cycle of school dramas.

The exact point of differentiation, it seems to me, lies in the
contrast between these two ways of presenting what is practically
the same religious truth. The Bible parable, as always, presented
its lesson by taking a single step from spiritual realities to the
concrete realities of daily life. But the medieval mind found it
easier to take two steps in order to apprehend the same truth:
first it reduced the doctrine to a formula exprest as a relation
between abstract concepts; and then it tried to vitalize these
abstractions by personifying them.

The two literary methods may take on a fresh significance when
interpreted as the products of two opposing systems of philosophy.
The Middle Ages found the morality congenial because this form of
allegory, as Ten Brink has noted,[4] was the natural expression of the
so-called " Realistic " philosophy that dominated the age, the phil-
osophy that looked upon abstract conceptions as having real exist-
ence. After the great dispute over the nature of Universals by the
earlier Schoolmen, Moderate or Aristotelian Realism was triumph-
ant by the end of the twelfth century; and throughout the thir-
teenth, the age of St. Thomas, its supremacy passed without dispute.
There followed, at the respectful distance which literature always
keeps at the heels of philosophy, the great outburst of allegory in
medieval literature, with such monuments as *Renart the Fox,* the
Roman de la Rose, and the moralities, all resting upon a basis of
personification. At the beginning of the fourteenth century Ock-
ham reopened the question of the Universal Ideas, which had been
closed for a hundred years. He taught that universals do not
correspond to " aught that is in the being of the things " but are
merely ideas in the mind, and thus restored Nominalism, or its
near relative Terminism, to the foreground of philosophic favor.

[4] *Hist. of Eng. Lit.,* vol. II, part I, p. 298.

His followers were powerful in the schools till the end of the fifteenth century. It was this revolution in philosophy, by which reality was found once again only in the concrete and the individual, that ushered in the great change in men's ways of thinking which exprest itself in religion as the Reformation, in culture as the Renaissance, and in literature as the dethronement of the morality or abstract allegory by the parable or concrete tale of real life with moral or spiritual implications.

The change took place far more rapidly in the drama than it did in epic and narrative verse. The old method of using abstractions and types as characters continued and reached its highest point of development when reinforced by classic influence in the comedy of humors of Ben Jonson. It was Jonson also who transformed the masque, by his introduction of the anti-masque and his infusion of abstract moral personifications, into a sort of veneered morality play, and so paved the way for *Comus*. But side by side with the old a new technique was growing up in the drama, in which these thinly veiled types and personifications, inherited, at least in part, from the moralities, were replaced by concrete individuals. Marlowe, the creator of the " tragedy of heroic individualization," and Shakspere were almost completely of the new age in this respect. They were literary Nominalists, to whom the universals and all merely abstract truths were but " flatus voci," and who conveyed their moral lessons by the concrete method of the parable.

Contemporary epic poetry, however, was at least half a century behind the drama in this development of characterization. Spenser, with his very slightly disguised personifications of the virtues and vices, is almost as medieval in his conception of character as the *Roman de la Rose*. His successors Giles and Phineas Fletcher, Quarles, and Sylvester are even more closely tied to the abstract personification. The truth is that Spenser and the whole of the Cambridge school of wits were caught in a backward eddy that threatened to reverse the whole stream of philosophic development and carry it back, at least so far as allegory is concerned, to something like the position of the earlier Middle Ages. The Platonic revival, which seemed for a time all-powerful in Italy and which in England had its headquarters at Cambridge, was, on the question of the reality of abstractions, a return not only to the Moderate Realism of Aquinas but to the Ultra-Realism of Scotus or Erigena.

These poets, who were ardently attached both to the most radical doctrines of theological reform and to the vague Platonism that was then the latest wear of all European Humanists, were in reality far more medieval than they themselves realized. As Courthope puts it, " they made their starting point in the scholastic and allegorical interpretation of Nature; their theological matter, for all its Calvinistic dress, is essentially the same as had been taught in the schools of Christian divinity since the time of St. Augustine." [5]

And so it is altogether natural that the youthful Milton, trained in the Cambridge atmosphere, tracing his poetic descent thru the epic and not the dramatic line, and inheriting, when he did first enter the dramatic field, the traditions of Jonson rather than of Shakspere, should show at the beginning a distinct preference for the medieval technique. The surprizing thing is that Milton did not, like Spenser, linger there. On the contrary, each successive poem reveals him as drawing away from the old and into the new method, away from the technique of the morality and into that of the parable. Each one of Milton's poems carried a spiritual lesson, —else he had not been Milton,—but while all his work is allegorical in the broader sense, it is only his youthful poetry that is dominated by the unreal and abstract type of allegory. As he workt out a philosophy for himself, departing ever more widely from that which he had inherited, his poetry showed a steady progress toward the real or concrete form of allegory. In thus passing during his lifetime from the morality to the parable, he merely offers a somewhat tardy reflection of the changing intellectual temper of his time. His youthful poems are almost wholly of the former age in their addiction to the personified abstraction; *Comus* is still approximately halfway a morality; in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* we see Milton, like his own lion, pawing to loosen his hinder limbs from the last grip of the medieval allegorical bog; and in *Samson Agonistes* he has written a play which, while profoundly allegorical in the concrete sense, has hardly a trace of the personified abstraction and none at all of the medieval allegorical categories.

The evidence for this course of development lies in an examination of the morality themes as they actually appear in Milton's work. At the very threshold we encounter an obvious morality play in the *Vacation Exercize,* apparently quite original, altho

[5] *Hist. of Eng. Poetry,* III. 134.

much in the same tradition as the Latin and vernacular University
drama of the early sixteenth century.   This little morality of the
Aristotelian Categories is unimportant except for the light it throws
on the extent to which medieval allegory still impregnated the uni-
versity atmosphere, and the readiness with which it was absorbed
by the youthful Milton.   The accent of the Schoolmen, struck thus
distinctly in what was almost his earliest production, was destined
to linger long in the voice of the poet.

Passing over such minor examples, I shall attempt here to follow
the traces in Milton's work merely of the four main themes of the
medieval morality: namely, those known as the Conflict of the
Vices and Virtues, the Coming of Death, the Debate of the Four
Daughters of God, and the Debate of the Soul and Body.   It may
be well to premise that in ascribing to Milton a widespread employ-
ment of concepts taken from each of these four old morality plots,
I am not suggesting the direct influence on him of any particular
morality, nor shall I attempt to point out the exact channel thru
which such influence reacht him.   Professor Greenlaw,[6] in his
illuminating study of the " intimate relationship of the spirit "
between Spenser and his " poetical son," has pointed out the kin-
ship both in plot and characterization between Spenser and the
moralities, and thus indicated one of these channels which may well
repay a more detailed investigation.   Numerous other possible in-
termediaries might easily be suggested.   Very possibly, and even
probably, Milton had never heard of a single one of the dramas
which we have on our present list of medieval moralities.   No
direct acquaintance is required by the circumstances of the case.
When we remember that one, and that not the most important of
the four themes, has been traced in a recent dissertation [7] thru over
seventy distinct versions in Latin, French, and English literature
alone, it is perfectly evident that Milton must have encountered
each of them repeatedly from the very beginning of his life as stu-
dent and reader.

It may be convenient to remind ourselves of the essential con-
tents of each of the four plots.[8]   By far the most important is the

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[6] " A Better Teacher than Aquinas," *Studies in Philology*, April, 1917.

[7] Hope Traver, *The Four Daughters of God*, 1907.

[8] Summarized from my intro. to *Magnificence*, p. cxlvii fol. (E. E. T. S.,
ex. ser. 98).

one known as the Conflict of Vices and Virtues. During its long development from the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius on down, it passed thru two chief stages, to the first of which alone the name conflict is strictly applicable. This earlier form depicted an actual physical combat between the contending camps of good and evil, conducted in Homeric fashion. Later the theme was transformed by the insertion of a central and neutral character, Mankind; and it became no longer a conflict of force but a struggle of wits, a competition of rival tempters. In this later form there were always at least two struggles: first the Vices succeeded in winning Mankind over to their side; then the Virtues won him back. Lookt at from Mankind's point of view, the scheme of events fell into four stages; first, Innocence; second, Temptation, or Triumph of Evil; third, Life-in-Sin; fourth, Repentance, or Triumph of Good. In the actual plays, of course this typical scheme is altered in various ways. The *dramatis personae* of the story, in its fully developt form, consisted first of all of the hero, Man, Mankind, or Humanum Genus, who does not act but is rather acted upon by the two camps between which he is placed. These are more or less evenly balanced: the Good Angel over against the Evil Angel, the divine Trinity against the infernal trinity of World, Flesh, and Devil, the seven cardinal virtues against the seven deadly sins, and various graces, such as Repentance, Conscience, Mercy, and the like, against miscellaneous assistant devils and subordinate evil types. From this potential storehouse of characters the actual plays make all sorts of selections.

The second plot, the allegory of Death, shows us Mankind again as a neutral figure, this time between this world and the next. As representatives of this world appear his earthly possessions and associates, Wealth, Strength, Wits, Friends, Kinsmen, Wife, and the like. The next world is represented mainly by the formidable figure of Mors, or Death, a personification which overshadows the scene and easily monopolizes the interest. Death is represented partly as a messenger of God and partly as an ally of the fiends. The plot affords material merely for a single powerful scene, altho the effect of the denoument may be heightened by prefixing a scene either of boastful security or of pious preparation, according to the character of the hero and victim.

The third plot, that of the Four Daughters of God, presents the

controversy of Justice and Truth with Mercy and Peace suggested
by the psalm verse. In the version of St. Bernard, which seems
most nearly the one that Milton had in mind, the allegory is con-
nected both with the Fall and the Nativity, and the action moves
between Earth and Heaven. Our first parents were attended in
their state of innocence by four divine guardians, who were the
daughters of God himself: Mercy to protect them, Truth to teach
them, Justice to rule them, Peace to foster them. After the Fall,
however, the four daughters were compelled to forsake sinful Man-
kind and repair to the throne of God in Heaven, where a grievous
contention arose between them over the punishment that was due.
When the Father affirms the necessity of a guiltless substitute for
the sinner, Truth returns to search the Earth and Mercy searches
Heaven for such a one, both in vain. Then the Son offers himself
as Atonement and is accepted; the daughters kiss and are recon-
ciled; and Christ descends to Earth, preceded by Gabriel to make
the Annunciation to the Virgin, and accompanied by the four
daughters. Peace, says Bernard, is present on Earth when He
arrives; Mercy and Truth go before His face; and Justice prepares
His throne.

The last of the four allegorical themes is the Debate of the Soul
and Body, which, tho not certainly represented in any of our extant
English morality plays, was a popular and widespread *motif* in
medieval religious literature, especially in the *débat* and the sermon.
In essence it consists of the depiction of the Body and Soul as
separated after death and separately personified. The conception
was a congenial one to the dualism that marked all forms of
medieval philosophy.

Traces of these four morality themes appear in Milton's work in
two ways. They contribute either incidents or characters. Just
as he uses ancient mythology either for its stories or for its names,
so he sometimes borrows a part or the whole of one of the morality
plots, sometimes merely mentions one or more of the personages
involved in them. They constituted, in fact, a medieval and Chris-
tian annex to his mythological storehouse; and he treated them in
precisely the same fashion. He combined them freely with each
other and with Greek and Roman legend; and he developt and
enlarged them as he saw fit, exercizing at times the same royal and
creative myth-making faculty that so conspicuously distinguishes
his handling of classical mythology.

In the shorter poems of Milton's youth, it is the third plot, that of the Four Daughters of God, which the reader catches sight of most frequently. It occurs first in the very earliest of Milton's original poems, *On the Death of a Fair Infant* (1625), in the eighth stanza:

> Or wert thou that just maid who once before
> Forsook the hated earth, oh! tell me sooth,
> And camest again to visit us once more?
> Or wert thou [Mercy,] that sweet smiling Youth?
> Or that crown'd Matron, sage white-robed Truth?
>   Or any other of that heavenly brood
>   Let down in cloudy throne to do the world some good?

All four of the daughters appear in the *Ode on the Nativity* (1629), Peace by herself in stanza 3:

> But he, her fears to cease,
> Sent down the meek-eyed Peace;
>   She, crown'd with olive green, came softly sliding
> Down thru the turning sphere,
> His ready harbinger,
>   With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing;
>   And, waving wide her myrtle wand,
>   She strikes a universal peace thru sea and land.

and the other three in stanza 15:

> Yea, Truth and Justice then
> Will down return to men,
>   Orb'd in a rainbow; and, like glories wearing,
> Mercy will sit between,
> Throned in celestial sheen
>   With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering;
>   And Heaven, as at some festival,
>   Will open wide the gates of her high palace-hall.

Verity in his edition has ascribed the stanza on Peace to a reminiscence from contemporary masques of the descent of some *dea ex machina;* but he is unable to cite an actual parallel. Evidently it is connected, as Professor Cook was the first to note,[9] with some form of our allegory. St. Bernard's version, by which the other three daughters are rather Christ's precursors, while only Peace is

[9] "Notes on Milton's Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," *Trans. Conn. Acad.*, 15. 346 (1909).

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said actually to have been with him on earth, is very close to the Nativity Ode:

" Porro venturum regem Misericordia et Veritas praevenerunt, sicut scriptum est: Misericordia et Veritas praecedent faciem tuum. Justitia thronum praeparat secundum illud: Justitia et judicium praeparatio sedis tuae. Pax cum rege venit, ut propheta fidelis inveniretur qui dixerat: Pax erit in terra nostra cum venerit. Inde est quod nato domino angelorum chorus canebat: Pax in terra hominibus bonae voluntatis." [10]

Miss Traver has noted that Bernard was led to associate the psalm verse for the first time with the incarnation of Christ by the fact that this psalm belongs in the Christmas service; here is an additional bond of connection with Milton's Christmas Ode.

Again in 1633 we encounter three of the daughters in the poem *On Time*:

> When everything that is sincerely good,
> And perfectly divine,
> With Truth, and Peace, and Love, shall ever shine
> About the supreme throne.

In the same year Milton included in the fragment *Upon the Circumcision* a version of the allegory that is nearly complete:

> O more exceeding Love, or Law more just?
> Just Law, indeed, but more exceeding Love!
> For we, by rightful doom remediless,
> Were lost in death, till he, that dwelt above
> High-throned in secret bliss, for us frail dust
> Emptied his glory, even to nakedness;
> And that great covenant which we still transgress
> Entirely satisfied,
> And the full wrath beside
> Of vengeful Justice bore for our excess.

In the last two passages Mercy is replaced by Love, a substitution which is fairly common in medieval versions of the allegory.[11]

With these references may be included two others of a later period. In 1648 Milton translated Psalm 85, which contains the parent verses from which sprang the whole allegory. His rendering is as follows, words supplied being italicized:

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[10] St. Bernard, " In Festo Annunciationis Beatae Virginis," Migne, *Patr. Lat.* CLXXXIII. 383.

[11] Traver, pp. 67, 79, 120, 121, 162.

10 Mercy and Truth, *that long were miss'd,*
    Now *joyfully* are met;
    Sweet Peace and Righteousness have kiss'd,
    And hand in hand are set.
11 Truth from the earth *like to a flower*
    Shall bud and blossom *then;*
    And Justice from her heavenly bower
    Look down *on mortal men.*

In the sonnet *To Cromwell* (1652) two of the daughters are mentioned:

Cromwell, our chief of men, who thru a cloud
    Not of war only, but detractions rude,
    Guided by Faith and matchless Fortitude,
To Peace and Truth thy glorious way hast plowed.

Bishop Newton's note to these lines informs us that the phrase " To Peace and Truth " was peculiarly familiar to the people of the time since certain of the silver coins of the Commonwealth bore the inscription around the edge. It would probably be nearer the mark to say that the inscription was chosen because the phrase was familiar; and its familiarity is another proof of the popularity of our allegory

In this group of passages we have one of the best examples of the fusion of classic mythology and medieval allegory already mentioned as characteristically Miltonic. Beside the manifest relation to the old morality plot, there is also partial dependence upon the myth of the Golden Age, as Milton was familiar with it in the poetry of Hesiod, Aratus, Ovid, and Virgil. The " just maid who once before forsook the hated earth " of course goes back to the " Jam redit et Virgo " of the Fourth Eclogue and Ovid's account in the first book of the Metamorphoses of the depravity of the Age of Iron, ending in the lines

Victa jacet pietas, et Virgo caede madentes
Ultima caelestum terras Astraea reliquit.

The identity of Astrea and Justice is establisht in the description by Aratus of the constellation Virgo. But the main source for Milton, as for all later poets, was doubtless Hesiod, whose fondness for abstractions made him especially congenial. Hesiod, it is true, does not mention that Justice abandoned the earth after the Golden Age, assigning that rôle rather to Aidos and Nemesis: " And then

Aidos and Nemesis, with their sweet forms wrapt in white robes, will go from the wide-pathed earth and forsake mankind to join the company of the deathless gods " (*Works and Days,* ll. 197-200). Elsewhere, however, in the same poem he speaks of " virgin Justice, the daughter of Zeus, who is honored and reverenced among the gods who dwell on Olympus, and whenever anyone hurts her with lying slander, she sits beside her father, Zeus the son of Cronos, and tells him of men's wicked heart " (ll. 256-260). With Justice is associated, as dwelling in the land of those who respect her, " Peace, the nurse of children " (l. 228); and in the Theogony Zeus's daughters by Themis are enumerated as " Order, and Justice, and blooming Peace " (l. 902). Truth is not mentioned by Hesiod, but may perhaps have been suggested by Ovid's phrase " fugere pudor verumque fidesque " (l. 129). There is no classical source for the characteristically Christian Mercy.

A close examination will show that both the classic and the medieval source are needed to account for Milton's lines. The earliest passage, that from *On the Death of a Fair Infant,* might be entirely classical, except for the (conjectural) mention of Mercy. The mention in the last two lines of the stanza of " that heavenly brood let down in cloudy throne," which no editor has explained, can hardly refer to the morality characters; perhaps it is an allusion to Hesiod's statement that " upon the bounteous earth Zeus has thrice ten thousand spirits, watchers of mortal men, and these keep watch on judgments and deeds of wrong as they roam, clothed in mist, all over the earth " (*Works and Days,* ll. 252-255), a passage which is recalled in the " thousand liveried angels " of *Comus* who will protect chastity and " drive far off each thing of sin and guilt," and again in *Paradise Lost:*

> Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
> Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep. (IV. 677.)

The passage in the *Ode on the Nativity,* naturally, owes less to pagan sources; and yet it is to be noted that Milton ascribes the final return of Truth, Justice, and Mercy, not to the birth of Christ, but as Virgil does to a future when " Time will run back and fetch the Age of Gold." Even in his translation of the psalm itself, Milton interpolates after the names of the virtues the phrase " that long were missed," thus inserting the classical idea of a return that is absent from the Scripture original.

The blending process here exemplified may very possibly have begun long before Milton; otherwise it is hard to account for the striking similarities between the classic myth and the allegory that have grown up even as early as St. Bernard. A later version mentioned by Miss Traver goes so far as to substitute for Justice the classical name of Astrea.[12] But the process was especially congenial to Milton, as *Lycidas* and many other composites of Christian and pagan allusion bear witness.

In this connection it may be observed that there are serious objections to the emendation by which " Mercy " has been inserted in the defective line (53) of *On the Death of a Fair Infant:*

> Or wert thou [Mercy,] that sweet smiling youth?

a change first proposed in Newton's edition of 1751. Newton omits the name of the author of this conjecture, but Warton, who adopted it in his edition of the Minor Poems in 1785, as all subsequent editors have done, says that it was first suggested, " in a periodical Miscellany which appeared about the year 1750," by " the late Mr. John Heskin, of Christ-Church, Oxford, who publisht an elegant edition of Bion and Moschus." As emended, the line involves the absurdity of making Mercy masculine, or else supposing that the poet uses " youth " here to mean a young woman. Masson accepts the former alternative, explaining that we have in " the three per-sonages of the stanza Justice (the maiden), Mercy (the young man), and Truth (the matron)." But, not to mention the fact that the conception of Mercy as masculine is unexampled in literature, Milton is here addressing his niece, and could hardly ask her if she had been a young man. On the other hand, the word " youth " is never feminine elsewhere in Milton, in Spenser, or in Shakspere; nor have I been able to find any instance of such a use of the word in its concrete application, at least in the singular. Heskin's rea-son for supposing that Mercy is the missing word is the use together of Truth, Justice, and Mercy again in stanza 15 of the *Ode on the Nativity*. But Milton is not wont to repeat himself so exactly; and I should like to suggest instead that the line originally read:

> Or wert thou that sweet [Peace, in] smiling youth?

The substitution of Peace for Mercy would enable us to explain the

[12] Traver, p. 117.

entire stanza from classical mythology alone, as is every other allu-
sion in the poem. Furthermore, the epithet "sweet" is used of
Peace in Milton's translation of the psalm, and was the favorite
epithet for that divinity of Milton's master Spenser.

The allegory of the Four Daughters becomes even more promi-
nent in the prose works of Milton's middle period than it was in
the poetry of his youth. The references which a hurried reading
has collected are surprisingly numerous. Indeed, so fixt does the
theme seem to have become in Milton's mind that he can hardly
refrain, whenever he has occasion to mention one of the four
virtues, from bringing in one or more of her sisters or alluding to
some incident of their story, with or without special appropriate-
ness. A few of these allusions may be cited.[13] In his *Of Reforma-
tion in England* (1641) Milton says:

> "It is not the common law, nor the civil, but Piety and Justice that are
> our foundresses; they stoop not, neither change color for aristocracy,
> democracy, or monarchy, nor yet at all interrupt their just courses; but
> far above the taking notice of these inferior niceties, with perfect sympathy,
> wherever they meet, kiss each other." (II. 412.)

Of Prelatical Episcopacy (1641):

> "We do injuriously in . . . searching among the verminous and polluted
> rags dropped overworn from the toiling shoulders of Time, with these
> deformedly to quilt and interlace the entire, the spotless, and undecaying
> robe of Truth, the daughter not of Time, but of Heaven, only bred up here
> below in Christian hearts, between two grave and holy nurses, the Doctrine
> and Discipline of the gospel." (II. 428.)

The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelaty (1642):

> "For the which and all their former misdeeds, whereof this book and
> many volumes more cannot contain the moiety, I shall move ye, lords, in
> the behalf I dare say of many thousand good Christians, to let your Justice
> and speedy sentence pass against this great malefactor, Prelaty. And yet
> in the midst of rigor I would beseech ye to think of Mercy." (II. 507.)

The best instance of this inevitable mental association in Milton's
mind occurs in the last chapter of *Eikonoklastes* (1649). Here he
wishes to press home the claims of justice in the matter of Charles's
execution; but Justice at once suggests Truth to him, and he must
needs begin by a discussion whether Truth or Justice is the

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[13] The Prose Works of Milton are cited from the edition of J. A. St. John.

stronger. In an eloquent but surely an irrelevant passage, which is too long to quote, the personification of the two virtues is developt at length.

In three of his treatises, however, the allegory is used in a fit and relevant way, and become an appropriate part of the structure. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), where Milton is again discussing the justice of executing Charles, the argument naturally enough reminds him of the debate of the daughters, and he pleads the cause of Justice against Mercy, who was championed by the Presbyterians. Inevitably he thinks of the case in terms of the old medieval morality. And just as here he was arguing against the danger of letting Justice be overborne by mistaken Mercy toward King Charles, so in his divorce pamphlets he was pleading earnestly in behalf of Mercy and Charity to alleviate the harsh exactions of Justice in the customary construction of the marriage bond. Once more the two personifications are constantly on his lips (*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, 1643):

" Let no man doubt therefore to affirm, that it is not so hurtful or dishonorable to a commonwealth . . . when worse faults . . . are committed by whoso dares under strict and executed penalty, as when less faults, tolerated for fear of greater, harden their faces, not their hearts only, under the protection of public authority. For what less indignity were this, than as if Justice herself, the Queen of Virtues, descending from her sceptered royalty, instead of conquering, should compound and treat with Sin, her eternal adversary and rebel, upon ignoble terms? " (III. 246.)

And again in the pathetic close of Milton's appeal:

" Last of all, to those whose mind is still to maintain textual restrictions, whereof the bare sound cannot consist sometimes with humanity, much less with Charity, I would ever answer, by putting them in remembrance of a command above all commands, which they seem to have forgot, and who spake it . . . ' I will have Mercy and not sacrifice '; for on that saying all the law and prophets depend; much more the gospel, whose end and excellence is Mercy and Peace. Or if they cannot learn that, how will they hear this? which yet I shall not doubt to leave with them as a conclusion, that God the Son hath put all other things under his own feet, but his commandments he hath left all under the feet of Charity." (III. 273.)

By far the finest use of the myth which Milton makes, either in his prose or his poetry, is in the *Areopagitica* (1644). Here, of course, Truth is the most prominent of the four daughters, and her personification rules the essay. The entire *Areopagitica,* indeed,

is shot thru with the myth of Truth; but the allegory comes to clearest expression in this paragraph:

> "Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who, as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all, lords and commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection. Suffer not these licensing prohibitions to stand at every place of opportunity forbidding and disturbing them that continue seeking, that continue to do our obsequies to the torn body of our martyred saint." (II. 89.)

This noble passage completes the myth of the daughters, and affords an exquisite example of Milton's myth-making power at work on a medieval theme, blending with it the classical reminiscence of Osiris as he had previously done that of Astrea. Taking all his references together, we discover that he has enriched and expanded the story almost beyond recognition, till it extends in outline from before the creation of the world to the last judgment, on a scale comparable only to that of the medieval miracle cycles. Milton's imagination has, in fact, working as it were at odd moments, constructed the framework for another epic.

In view of the place which the allegory of the daughters held in the mind of Milton, it is of much interest to note how it unmistakably influenced Shakspere also. Miss Traver has pointed out how remarkably similar the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* is to certain French forms of the allegory, Portia taking the place of Mercy and Shylock of Justice.[14] I mention this here because of another parallel with the same play which I shall draw later on.

The Debate was not the only morality theme much in Milton's mind during the period of the minor poems. The allegory of the Coming of Death is likewise frequently made use of. Indeed, the personified figure of Death seems to have haunted the imagination

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[14] Traver, p. 94.

of the youthful Milton, as it has in our own day the youthful Mae-
terlinck. Death appears, quite in the manner of the moralities, in
no less than seven of his extremely numerous elegies. Five of these
are products of his university career, the four earliest being in
Latin.

On the University Beadle (Elegia Secunda), 1626:

> Te, qui conspicuus baculo fulgente solebas
>   Palladium toties ore ciere gregem,
> Ultima praeconum praeconem te quoque saeva
>   Mors rapit, officio nec favet ipsa suo.
>
> (ll. 1-4.)

On the Bishop of Winchester (Elegia Tertia), 1626:

> Dum procerum ingressa est splendentes marmore turres
>   Dira sepulchrali Mors metuenda face,
> Pulsavitque auro gravidos et jaspide muros,
>   Nec metuit satrapum sternere falce greges.
>
> (ll. 5-8.)

On the Vice-Chancellor (Sylvarum Liber, no. 1), 1626:

> Vos (i. e. Iapeti nepotes) si relicto Mors vaga Taenaro
> Semel vocarit flebilis, heu! morae
>   Tentantur incassum dolique;
>   Per tenebras Stygis ire certum est.
>
> (ll. 5-8.)

On the Bishop of Ely (Sylvarum Liber, no. 3), 1626:

> Non est, ut arbitraris elusus miser,
>   Mors atra Noctis filia,
> Erebove patre creta, sive Erinnye,
>   Vastove nata sub Chao:
> Ast illa, caelo missa stellato, Dei
>   Messes ubique colligit;
> Animasque mole carnea reconditas
>   In lucem et auras evocat, . . .
> Et sempiterni ducit ad vultus Patris.
>   At justa raptat impios
> Sub regna furvi luctuosa Tartari
>   Sedesque subterraneas.
>
> (ll. 31-44.)

On Hobson the Carrier, 1631:

> Here lies old Hobson. Death has broke his girt,
> And here, alas! hath laid him in the dirt (et passim)

The personification is absent, however, and the absence is significant, from the two latest and best of the elegies of the earlier period, *Lycidas* and the *Epitaphium Damonis*. If we read the latter poem in Cowper's translation, it is true, we find an example of just such personification:

> We scarce in thousands meet one kindred mind;
> And if the long-sought good at last we find,
> When least we fear it, Death our treasure steals,
> And gives our heart a wound that nothing heals.

> (ll. 108-111.)

But an examination of the original shows that Cowper, in characteristic eighteenth century fashion, has imported the "capital letter personification":

> Vix sibi quisque parem de milibus invenit unum;
> Aut, si sors dederit tandem non aspera votis,
> Illum inopina dies, qua non speraveris hora,
> Surripit, aeternum linquens in saecula damnum.

The most detailed use that Milton makes of the medieval allegory occurs in Sonnet XIV, *To Mrs. Catherine Thomson* (1646). This reads almost like a condenst version of the old morality *Everyman*. "Flesh" in line 4 (in the first draft, which is here followed) corresponds to the morality figures Beauty and Wits; we have Good Deeds in line 5, in "Works and Alms"; and the graces Faith and Love replace Knowledge and Confession.

> When Faith and Love, which parted from thee never,
>   Had ripen'd thy just Soul to dwell with God,
>   Meekly thou didst resign this earthy clod
> Of Flesh and sin, which man from heaven doth sever.
> Thy Works, and Alms, and all thy good endeavour,
>   Stay'd not behind, nor in the grave were trod;
>   But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod,
> Follow'd thee up to joy and bliss for ever.
>
> Love led them on; and Faith, who knew them best
>   Thy handmaids, clad them o'er with purple beams
> And azure wings, that up they flew so drest,
>   And spake the truth of thee in glorious themes
> Before the Judge; who henceforth bid thee rest,
>   And drink thy fill of pure immortal streams.

Finally, in the latest of the sonnets, no. XXIII, *On His Deceased*

Wife (1658), we have another example of the fusion of the medieval theme with classic mythology, in the allusion to *Alcestis*. Milton here makes beautiful use of the one ancient drama which comes nearest, in form and feeling, to the medieval morality.

The examination of these earlier treatments by Milton of the theme of death is not without its value for the study of *Paradise Lost,* and may serve to guard against doubtful conclusions based upon the epic alone. Professor Erskine, in an otherwise illuminating article on " The Theme of Death in *Paradise Lost*," [15] has pointed out that death in *Paradise Lost* is regarded as both a curse and a blessing, both as the gift of Satan and the gift of God; and he regards the latter opinion as a development of the poet's old age. " The theologian in him was persuaded that death was a curse, the result of sin; but the poet in him uttered his true opinion, after a long and exhausting life, that death is a heaven-sent release." A comparison of Milton's earlier expressions of opinion, especially the passage cited above from the elegy on the Bishop of Ely, written in his seventeenth year, shows that Milton did not need " a long and exhausting life " to teach him that death is often a kindly messenger sent from God. Here he opposes the two opinions, of the infernal or the heavenly sending of death, and decides definitely for the latter. He might have learned both views from the medieval morality plays, where Death has just the same ambiguous relation to the two realms of Heaven and Hell. Death is a friend of the fiends in so far as he hands over to them their eagerly expected prey, as he does in the Coventry play of the Death of Herod. On the other hand, he is sent by God and is simply one of his agents, " Goddys masangere," as he is explicitly called in *Everyman*.[16]

Closely connected with the allegory of Death is that of the Soul and Body. This is by all odds the rarest of the four to appear in Milton's works, and the one that disappeared soonest; but it is especially significant, just by reason of its early disappearance, of the change that took place in his philosophy. To the Platonists of Cambridge, with whom Milton came in such close contact in his youth, the definition of the soul as a real being, an incorporeal and eternal substance, was essential, and hence the conception of a com-

[15] PMLA. 32. 573 (Dec. 1917).
[16] Cf. *Magnificence*, intro. clxxvi.

plete separation of soul and body after death was familiar and
inevitable. The same had been the position of the early or Ultra
Realists of the Middle Ages. The Aristotelian or Moderate Real-
ists of the type of Aquinas also accepted the doctrine of a separation,
but with certain definite restrictions. They adopted the position
that only the " rational soul," that is, the distinctively spiritual
faculties of Understanding and Will, to which was added by one
party the Memory (called the Mind in the English morality play
Wisdom), continued in conscious existence after death. Thus both
Platonist and Aristotelian, both Ultra and Moderate Realist could
use with good conscience the allegory of Soul and Body; and the
evidence of his youthful phraseology would seem to show that
Milton too accepted without difficulty the conventional conception.
In the passage already cited from the elegy *On the Bishop of Ely*
Milton tells how Death " animas mole carnea reconditas in lucem
et auras evocat "; and a few lines further on he puts into the mouth
of the dead man an account of how gladly he heard the summons
of the harvester of God, and how he left the foul prison of his
earthly body and felt himself carried up thru starry worlds to the
Heaven where he still abides. Quite in the same spirit are the
lines in *Il Penseroso:*

> "or unsphere
> The spirit of Plato to unfold
> What worlds or what vast regions hold
> The immortal mind that hath forsook
> Her mansion in this fleshly nook."

(ll. 88-92.)

In *Comus* Milton's ideas about the relation of soul and body have
become much less conventional, tho they are still not entirely un-
Platonic:

> Till oft converse with heavenly habitants
> Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape,
> The unpolluted temple of the mind,
> And turns it by degree to the soul's essence,
> Till all be made immortal. But, when lust,
> By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
> But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
> Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
> The soul grows clotted by contagion,
> Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
> The divine property of her first being.

Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp
Oft seen in charnel vaults and sepulchres,
Lingering and sitting by a new-made grave,
As loath to leave the body that it loved,
And link'd itself by carnal sensualty
To a degenerate and degraded state.

(ll. 459-475.)

Here the soul is still represented as originally independent of the body, but it is declared that she may lose this independence thru 'sin and "imbody," thus becoming herself to a greater or less extent material. The fundamental idea in the passage, altho evidently suggested by the famous description in the *Phaedo* of the destruction of the soul's purity thru sense-knowledge, is, as Harrison notes,[17] different from Plato's in an essential particular. Plato ascribes the degradation and materializing of the soul to the contamination of sense-knowledge of any kind, whereas Milton makes it due to sensuality in the restricted moral sense, that is, to Sin. Milton is, in fact, here for the first time breaking away from Platonism; and the breach was characteristically due to his sense of the moral insufficiency of Plato's system, a defect which, as Harrison points out,[18] was felt also by Spenser, but to a much smaller degree.

The rift thus formed could not but widen. The position that Milton had for the moment assumed smacks too much of a belief in the inherent evil of matter, and it was impossible for a man with Milton's healthy physical outlook on the world to remain long contented with an approximation to the tenets of Manicheanism. Accordingly it is not surprizing that in *Paradise Lost* we find that he has abandoned the idea of any separation of soul and body whatever. Even the angels, as Raphael explains elaborately in the familiar passage in Book V, are not pure and abstracted spirits, but have material bodies of a special sort. The denial of any separation comes to clearest expression in Adam's soliloquy in Book X:

Yet one doubt
Pursues me still, lest all I cannot die;
Lest that pure breath of life, the spirit of Man
Which God inspired, cannot together perish
With this corporeal clod; then, in the grave,

[17] J. S. Harrison, *Platonism in English Poetry*, p. 55.
[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 189.

> Or in some other dismal place, who knows
> But I shall die a living death? O thought
> Horrid, if true! Yet why? It was but breath
> Of life that sinned: what dies but what had life
> And sin? the body properly hath neither.
> All of me then shall die: let this appease
> The doubt, since human reach no further knows.
>
> (x. 782-793.)

In the *Christian Doctrine* we have a reasoned defense of this quite unorthodox belief. Milton argues against the customary definition of death as the separation of soul and body, and maintains that the soul dies with the body; altho of course he also believes, on the basis of revelation, that there is a future resurrection of soul and body together. Naturally with this conviction dominating his mind, the allegory of Soul and Body vanishes from his work, and there are no further instances of separate personification of the two principles.[19]

If we are justified in thus tracing Milton's progress from the Platonic point of view thru the Aristotelian, and considerably beyond, it becomes of interest to discover just when he finally abandoned belief in the independent existence of the soul. The precise time is likely to remain uncertain, but he would seem to have been still wavering in 1646 when he wrote the sonnet *To Mrs. Catharine Thomson* quoted above. In the first draft as it appears in the Trinity manuscript he speaks of his friend as resigning "this earthy clod of flesh"; but apparently with some misgiving he changed in the second draft to the more non-committal lines:

> Meekly thou didst resign this earthy load
> Of death, called life, which us from life doth sever.

Whenever the transformation of his philosophy was consummated, the shift was an all-important one for his relation to the morality themes; for with the fading of Milton's sense of the independent reality of the soul there necessarily faded too his sense of the reality

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[19] Raleigh (*Milton*, p. 164) has expressed the opinion that Milton might have found great opportunities for his epical vein in the old medieval theme of the Harrowing of Hell and the release of the captive souls. But aside from the theological objections he would have felt to the Romish legend, such a theme would have been philosophically meaningless to the author of *Paradise Lost* and the *Christian Doctrine*.

of any other spiritual abstraction, and all abstract personifications lost their vitality in his imagination.

The most important of the four morality plots, the Conflict of Vices and Virtues, is comparatively little in evidence in Milton's earliest poems. The Nativity Ode contains a few personifications from its circle of characters, such as Vanity, Sin, and Nature. But not until *Comus* (1634) is its presence unmistakable. In Comus we have, as has often been remarked, a compound of mingled elements, altho subdued into unity by a master's hand. Compared with other masques it seems like a regular drama; compared with regular dramas it appears evidently an allegorical masque. In truth it is both. The plot is roughly that of the old morality; but how far transformed! In place of the personified Mankind is the Lady; the Good Angel is quite recognizable in the Attendant Spirit; the two brothers are the Virtues; Comus and his crew are the Vices; and Sabrina is the Grace who regularly entered at the last stage to deliver Mankind from the entanglement of sin. In *Comus* Milton has, it is true, omitted the inner moral conflict that was a part of the essence of the old morality; the Lady resists temptation, invincible in the might of " that unblemished form of Chastity," instead of succumbing as Mankind invariably did to the assaults of the Vices. This dominant idea of the self-sufficiency of the virtuous soul [20] is the clearest mark that Milton's already declining Platonism has left upon the play; and with all its marvelous beauty of expression it must be judged, in the last analysis, an element of weakness from the dramatic point of view, for it makes the struggle at bottom unreal. In *Paradise Lost* Milton's confidence in the utter powerlessness of evil even temporarily to effect its purposes had vanished with his youth, and the loss brought an undeniable gain, in maturity and in greatness, to the later work. From several points of view, indeed, it might have been more fitting had *Comus* been the epic and *Paradise Lost* the drama. But with this important restriction, all the stages of the typical morality plot are easily discernible: the opening scene of Innocence and Security, the great Temptation scene, the Life-in-Sin replaced here by the merely external magic spell that falls upon the Lady, and lastly the Deliverance thru Sabrina's aid. It is

[20] Harrison, p. 64.

noteworthy that there is only one strictly personal name in the play, that of Sabrina; even Comus is a Greek abstract noun personified. It might have been translated in English as Revelry, or Luxury, or Sensuality, with a capital letter, or Caro the Flesh, to use the customary medieval term; and must have been so felt by Milton, in spite of its previous use as the name of a God.

And yet, altho the characters of *Comus* cannot hide their descent from the personified abstraction, either in name or nature, they have at least advanced farther on the road to personality than any other members of their class. The adoption of a simple human story for the beginning of the play, so life-like that the tradition could arise of an actual losing of the way in the woods, and the substitution of the human relationship of brothers and sister for the traditional connection of the Virtues with Mankind, mark the entrance of some elements at least of the concrete in place of the abstract allegory. *Comus* is thus half a morality, half a parable.

Paradise Lost and *Paradise Regained,* on the other side of the great chasm that divided Milton's life, are also on the other side of the dividing line that I have endeavored to draw in this essay. They are accounts of what in Milton's mind were thoroly actual events and real persons; and so far as they are symbolic at all, it is predominantly with the concrete sort of symbolism. But there are certain features in the two epics which might suggest to the careful reader that this freedom from the abstract personification is due to a process of elimination, not quite completed, even if we had not, in the four preliminary drafts, a manifest disclosure of how the elimination went on. These early drafts demonstrate that what Milton began in 1640 was not an epic, nor even, except in external form, a classical tragedy, but a morality play; and a play containing not only one of the old morality plots that I have outlined, but three of them in combination.

To show more clearly the structure of the projected drama, I have arranged the contents of Milton's third draft, where for the first time there is a division into acts, side by side with the corresponding themes from the moralities. As will appear, in Act 1 we find the Debate of the Four Daughters; Acts 2, 3, and 4 present the Conflict of the Vices and Virtues; and Act 5 gives us the Coming of Death.

Moses προλογίζει

Act 1. Justice, Mercy, debating what should become of man if he fall. Wisdome (hymne of the creation). Chorus of Angels sing.

Act 2. Heavenly Love. Evening Starre. Chorus sing the marriage song and describe Paradise.

Act 3. Lucifer contriving Adam's ruine. Chorus feares for Adam and relates Lucifer's rebellion and fall.

Act 4. Adam, Eve, fallen. Conscience cites them to God's examination. Chorus bewails and tells the good Adam hath lost.

Act 5. Adam and Eve, driven out of Paradise. Presented by an angel with Labor, Grief, Hatred, Envie, Warre, Famine, Pestilence, Winter, Heat, Tempest, etc., Sickness, Discontent, Ignorance, Feare, Death,—mutes to whom he gives their names. Faith, Hope, Charity, comfort him and instruct him. Chorus briefly concludes.

DEBATE OF THE FOUR DAUGHTERS OF GOD.

CONFLICT OF THE VICES AND VIRTUES.
1. Stage of Innocence.
2. Stage of Temptation.
3. Stage of Life-in-Sin.

THE COMING OF DEATH. (with a suggestion of the last stage, Repentance, of the Conflict plot.)

The first of medieval morality plays, *The Castle of Perseverance*, is strikingly similar in its structure to this scheme of Milton's. It also combines the three plots, tho in a different order, putting the Four Daughters at the end instead of at the beginning. Briefly summarized, its contents are as follows:

CONFLICT OF THE VICES AND VIRTUES. 1. Stage of Innocence. The hero Humanum Genus, just born, appears between his good and bad angel. 2. Stage of Temptation. Humanum Genus succumbs to the persuasions of his Bad Angel and goes off to dwell with Mundus. 3. Stage of Life-in-Sin. Humanum Genus is introduced successively to all the seven Deadly Sins. 4. Stage of Repentance. Humanum Genus is convicted of sin and taken into the Castle to dwell with the seven Virtues. 5. Second Temptation. After an unsuccessful assault on the Castle, the Vices ensnare Humanum Genus once more by sending Covetousness round to the back door. 6. Second Life-in-Sin. Humanum Genus, now an old man, dwells with Covetousness.

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THE COMING OF DEATH. Mors leaps over the protecting ditch and pierces Humanum Genus to the heart with his spear.

DEBATE OF THE FOUR DAUGHTERS. The soul of Humanum Genus appears for judgment before the throne of God, and, after the conflicting claims of the Daughters have been reconciled, gains salvation.

Skelton's *Magnificence* affords a parallel to the evils that accompany Death in Milton's scheme in its not un-Miltonic figures of Adversity and Poverty. Other parallels might be drawn from later moralities as well as from many of the works that have been declared " sources " of *Paradise Lost,* such as the *Adamo* of Andreini. They are all to be considered, if I may be allowed to repeat myself, merely as analogs,—evidences that these morality ideas had become commonplaces of the time. The exact identification of the particular channels thru which they reached Milton is probably impossible and perhaps unimportant.

The quarter of a century that elapsed betwen the jotting down of these tentative drafts and the completed epic brought many modifications in Milton's scheme. In the poem as we have it we can easily see how the morality personifications, so prominent in his initial plan, have faded and retreated into the background. But there is evidence that they never vanished altogether. We have already noted how incessantly the reminiscences of the Four Daughters recur in his prose works. It would be possible to show how the theme of the Conflict with the Vices also persisted in the background of his thoughts, and how it finds expression in some of his finest and most eloquent moods. In the *Second Defense of the People of England* (1654), written when the epic must already have begun to take definite shape in his imagination, we find such a passage in his eulogy of Cromwell (as translated by Fellowes):

" In a short time he almost surpassed the greatest generals in the magnitude and the rapidity of his achievements. Nor is this surprising; for he was a soldier disciplined to perfection in the knowledge of himself. He had either extinguished, or by habit had learned to subdue, the whole host of vain hopes, fears, and passions, which infest the soul. He first acquired the government of himself, and over himself acquired the most signal victories; so that on the first day he took the field against the external enemy, he was a veteran in arms, consummately practised in the toils and exigencies of war." (I. 285.)

A still loftier use of the theme is to be found in the peroration of the same work:

"For it is of no little consequence, O citizens, by what principles you are governed, either in acquiring liberty, or in retaining it when acquired. . . . Unless you will subjugate the propensity to avarice, to ambition, and sensuality, and expel all luxury from yourselves and from your families, you will find that you have cherished a more stubborn and intractable despot at home, than you ever encountered in the field; and even your very bowels will be continually teeming with an intolerable progeny of tyrants. Let these be the first enemies whom you subdue; this constitutes the campaign of peace; these are triumphs, difficult indeed, but bloodless; and far more honorable than those trophies which are purchased only by slaughter and by rapine. Unless you are victors in this service, it is in vain that you have been victorious over the despotic enemy in the field." (I. 295.)

Note particularly how the three chief enemies named are "avarice, ambition, and sensuality," the same trio that Eve so disastrously encountered in the garden. In these sonorous periods one can almost divine the epic struggling toward birth in the poet's imagination.

In the finished poem we can still detect the presence of the old plots, faded tho they are almost to extinction. The Debate of the Four Daughters, for instance, reappears in the Third Book, which corresponds roughly to Act 1 of the early draft, and also in the Tenth Book, transformed into the discussion between Father and Son in which is formed the design of the Atonement. The four virtues, Truth, Justice, Mercy, Peace, constantly recur in the discussion, personified but, if I may make a distinction, no longer personalized. A few examples will suffice:

> He (Adam) with his whole posterity must die;
> Die he or Justice must.
>
> (III. 209.)
>
> O Thou (Christ) in Heaven and Earth the only Peace
> Found out for mankind under wrath.
>
> (III. 274.)
>
> With Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth.
>
> (III. 338.)
>
> He (Christ) to appease thy wrath, and end the strife
> Of Mercy and Justice in thy face discern'd.
>
> (III. 406.)
>
> Easy it may be seen that I intend
> Mercy colleague with Justice.
>
> (X. 58.)
>
> "Why comes not Death,"
> Said he, "with one thrice-acceptable stroke
> To end me? Shall Truth fail to keep her word,

Justice divine not hasten to be just?
But Death comes not at call; Justice divine
Mends not her slowest pace for prayers or cries."

(x. 854-9.)

Peace returned
Home to my breast.

(xi. 153.)

Indeed, a reading of these parts of the epic, usually regarded as dull and comparatively weak, in the light of the succession of medieval allegories of which they form the summit and capstone, should, it seems to me, give a new angle for criticism and inspire a new respect for the judgment and taste with which Milton accomplished this necessary part of his task.

He has kept considerably more of the Coming of Death. The figure of Death itself, and that of Sin, are the only pure abstractions left in the poem. The other " mutes " listed in the draft nearly all reappear in the cloud of evils which the Tenth Book describes as brought down upon the earth. But instead of making a " mask " of them as he indicated in the fourth draft, Milton has described them directly and concretely, with only passing personification. The retention of Sin and Death, which is usually felt as an incongruity in *Paradise Lost,* was perhaps due to the fact that the old medieval allegory was here reinforced by a new and original allegory derived from a favorite Protestant verse of Scripture (" Then when Lust hath conceived it bringeth forth Sin, and Sin when it is finished bringeth forth Death," *James* i, 15). Milton would perhaps have been able to escape the fascination of the old morality, had it stood alone, but when it became blended in his mind with the new Protestant allegory, its charms were too great for him to resist.[21]

The most important trace, however, of the influence of the moralities upon *Paradise Lost* is discoverable in the Conflict of the Vices and Virtues; and it lies not in the retention of any single abstraction, but in the grouping of the characters. Here lies, I believe, a valuable sidelight on the vext question of the hero of the epic. Of course Adam is technically the hero, but he is what may be called a passive hero; he is the center of the story, acted upon rather than acting, and drawn hither and thither

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[21] Cf. J. S. P. Tatlock, " Milton's Sin and Death," *MLN.* 21. 239 (1906).

by the two contending camps of Heaven and Hell. The chieftains of the two camps are respectively Christ and Satan, and naturally both of them are far stronger and more heroic in the ordinary sense of the word than is Adam. Hence the various theories that claim either Satan or Christ as "the hero" of *Paradise Lost.* Now the chief morality plot, the Conflict of Vices and Virtues, has precisely the same grouping; and the same result prevails in most of the moralities based upon it; the real hero Mankind is passive and weak; and the strongest rôle, the best acting part, is almost always the leader of the Vices, who developed in consequence into the stock character known as "the Vice of the play." [22]

It is noteworthy that precisely the same grouping prevails in Shakspere's *Merchant of Venice,* which as we have seen shows distinct traces of the influence of another morality plot; and the same trouble has arised over the identification of its hero. Antonio is the central character, the passive hero; Portia, a far stronger personality, is the leader of the Virtues; Shylock is the "Vice" of the play; and Portia and Shylock in consequence offer the strongest rôles.

Professor Erskine, in the article already referred to, well describes this impersonal and passive character of Adam, especially in the first part of the epic. It is plainly an inheritance from his earlier allegorical function as typical Man, no small part of which Milton allows him to retain. Of course Milton was perfectly aware that Adam = Mankind in Hebrew, just as Comus = Revelry in Greek.

The closeness with which the epic follows the typical plot of the Conflict of the Vices and Virtues has already been indicated. In the analysis of this typical plot which has been given above, it was noted that its later and commoner form, with Mankind as central character and his tempting the central incident, was preceded by a primitive form, exemplified in the *Psychomachia,* wherein Mankind is omitted and there is an actual physical combat between the forces of good and evil. Both the earlier and later forms appear in *Paradise Lost.* Corresponding to the primitive conflict of force is the battle in Heaven with the rebel angels; the later struggle of wits into which the morality developed reappears as the temptation in the garden. The introduction of the

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[22] Cf. *Magnificence,* intro. cxc-cxciv.

direct physical combat, tho already hinted at in the plans of 1640, has been greatly extended in the completed epic, where of course it supplies some of the most famous scenes. It is interesting to note that in the *Castle of Perseverance* there is just such a combination of the physical with the intellectual conflict: [23] first the Vices make a frontal attack upon the Castle and its defenders, and only when they have been disastrously beaten back do they try the plan of secret service propaganda by sending Covetousness to talk with Humanum Genus behind the enemy's lines. The more intellectual form of offensive succeeds as brilliantly in the hands of Covetousness and of Satan as it has in more recent warfare.

In one respect, however, the old scheme has not been completely carried out in *Paradise Lost* as we have it. We have seen that the typical later form of the Conflict plot requires two struggles, in the first of which Evil is triumphant, but in the second Good; but the epic in its final form lacks this second struggle, or at best merely prefigures it. There is a suggestion of the last or Repentance stage of the moralities; but in the nature of the case there could be no complete restoration of Adam's lost happiness, and so *Paradise Lost* ends in sadness and defeat. The tragic close, much as it adds to the epic's dramatic and artistic effect, is a thing unparalleled by any form of the old morality, which was unfailingly optimistic.

The explanation lies of course in the fact that the last stage, the second struggle in which Virtue triumphs, is reserved for *Paradise Regained,* where the second Adam wins the same battle that the first Adam had lost. We have no early draft to show just when and how Milton first planned the epic of the Temptation of Christ; but it is not impossible that it was at one time conceived as merely the final act or the closing cantos of the larger work. A trace of such an original plan is perhaps betrayed by the fact that Milton issued *Paradise Lost* at first in ten books, instead of the consecrated epic number twelve, to which he altered it in the second edition. It may be that he once planned to devote Books Eleven and Twelve to what is now *Paradise Regained,* then later most fortunately changed his design and made two epics of what was in the beginning a single morality play. There is an interesting bit of evidence as to Milton's original intentions in the comparative

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[23] Cf. *Magnificence,* intro. cliv.

lengths of the different books of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained,* as shown in the following table:

Paradise Lost			Paradise Regained
First and Second Ed.	First Edition	Second Edition	
Book I— 798 lines	Book VII—1290	Book VII— 640	Book I—502 lines
" II—1055 "		" VIII— 653	" II—486 lines
" III— 742 "	" VIII—1189	" IX—1189	" III—443 lines
" IV—1015 "	" IX—1104	" X—1104	" IV—639 lines
" V— 907 "	" X—1540	" XI— 901	
" VI— 912 "		" XII— 649	

The first edition of *Paradise Lost* thus averaged 1055 lines to the book, but when Books VII and X were divided the four new books thus formed were disproportionately brief, averaging only 711 lines. The four books of *Paradise Regained* are briefer still, averaging only 517 lines. If, now, we could suppose that these were originally planned for two books instead of four, the two would have averaged 1034 lines, very nearly the same length as the original ten books of *Paradise Lost,* and thus in length at least would have been qualified to take their place as Books Eleven and Twelve of the earlier epic. At any rate, whatever the truth about their original unity, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained,* as has always been recognized, certainly belong together; and together they completely fill up the measure of the typical morality plot.

In Milton's last work, the *Samson Agonistes,* the medieval type of allegory exemplified in the morality play has vanished altogether. What the *Samson* might have been like if it had been composed at an earlier period of the author's life may be gathered from a passage in *The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelaty* (1641):[24]

"I cannot better liken the state and person of a king than to the mighty Nazarite Samson; who being disciplined from his birth in the precepts and the practice of temperance and sobriety, without the strong drink of injurious and excessive desires, grows up to a noble strength and perfection with those his illustrious and sunny locks, the laws, waving and curling about his godlike shoulders. And while he keeps them about him undiminished and unshorn, he may with the jawbone of an ass, that is, with the word of his meanest officer, suppress and put to confusion thousands of those that rise against his just power. But laying down his head among the strumpet flatteries of prelates, while he sleeps and thinks no harm, they wickedly

[24] Quoted by Raleigh, *Milton,* p. 50.

shaving off all those bright and weighty tresses of his law, and just preroga-
tives, which were his ornament and strength, deliver him over to indirect
and violent counsels, which, as those Philistines, put out the fair and far-
sighted eyes of his natural discerning, and make him grind in the prison-
house of their sinister ends and practices upon him; till he, knowing this
prelatical rasor to have bereft him of his wonted might, nourish again his
puissant hair, the golden beams of law and right; and they, sternly shook,
thunder with ruin upon the heads of those his evil counsellors, but not with-
out great affliction to himself." (II. 506.)

And yet *Samson Agonistes,* as it stands, is really one of the most
allegorical of all Milton's works. It has not only an unmistakable
second intention, that of imaging his own life and fortunes, but
a third, that of setting forth the downfall of the Puritan party
and its defense. Both applications have been many times pointed
out and need not be recapitulated. The point to notice is that,
thruout, the allegory is of the real and concrete form. There are
few or no personified abstractions; and there is not a syllable
that does not bear a plain and literal interpretation of the actual
story in hand. *Samson Agonistes* is thus completely of the new
age; and its allegory, so far as the type is concerned, is of precisely
the same kind as that of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel.* The
sort of symbolism used in these two poems is the same that Milton
finds in the Earth itself:

> Though what if Earth
> Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
> Each to the other like, more than on Earth is thought?

No matter how numerous the symbols or how close the symbolism
of earth to heaven, earth yet remains in its own concrete exist-
ence; and the narrative of Samson's fall is equally concrete.

Much might be said in conclusion of the relation of Milton's
earlier use and later gradual disuse of medieval methods of allegory
to his poetic style. Is not the famous " Miltonic vague," for instance,
an effect due largely to the decaying fragments of the disappear-
ing moralities and to the faded personifications in his later works?
The abstract personification does not by any means necessarily
produce this effect of stylistic vagueness; the impression is not
felt, for example, by the reader of Milton's youthful poems or of
the *Faerie Queen,* where the personifications are fresh and vivid.
An unqualified personification, like Duessa or " divinest Melan-
choly," may be pictured with all the precise detail and sharp
outline of a Botticelli; [25] but such figures as Satan, half an indi-

vidual and half an abstract principle of Evil, or Adam, who stands now for generalized Mankind, now for the concrete first man, inevitably have their outlines blurred.

Milton was not only the inheritor and perfector of the medieval morality tradition; he was also the gateway thru which the morality technique passed into later English literature. When in the eighteenth century Thomson, Collins, and Gray began to feel the magnetism of Milton's style, they responded by scattering thru their verses a profusion of Miltonic personifications, and thus filled their poetry with medieval terminology, without being aware of its ultimate medieval source. Seldom did they succeed in re-vitalizing this sounding Miltonic diction, for too often it was borrowed from Milton ready-made and not re-created in their own imaginations. And so, in spite of the fact that they got the trick mainly from the Minor Poems, the effect they achieved resembles rather that of the far less frequent personifications of *Paradise Lost* or *Samson Agonistes.* Wordsworth was entirely justified in condemning the " capital letter personifications " of his predecessors as " a mechanical device of style," tho he was ludicrously astray in declaring that "personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur" in his own volumes.[26] In point of fact he was even more addicted to their use than Milton had ever been, and some of his finest lines re-echo the old medieval figures. The poet who wrote " Nature never did betray the heart that loved her," " The World is too much with us," and

> " Ghostly Shapes
> May meet at noontide: Fear and trembling Hope,
> Silence and Foresight, Death the Skeleton,
> And Time the Shadow "

had no real quarrel with the personifications of the moralities when they were really made to live again as he could make them. In Wordsworth's case, as in Shelley's, the abstract personifications were the fruit of a genuine return of the spirit of Platonism. To adopt the useful distinction of Mr. Stewart,[27] theirs are spontaneous, not deliberate personifications. They often coincide with

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[25] Cf. J. B. Fletcher, " The Painter of the Poets," *Studies in Philology,* April, 1917.

[26] In the " Preface to the Lyrical Ballads."

[27] J. A. Stewart, " Platonism in English Poetry," *English Literature and the Classics,* Oxford, 1912.

the personifications of medieval artists, not as a result of imitation or of conscious tradition, but because both ages shared alike in a genuine vision. Milton's use of personified abstractions was equally genuine and sincere, until he outgrew the philosophy that inspired them; and in proportion as they ceased to live for him he ceased to use them.

I have spoken of the progress in Milton's art from the abstract to the concrete type of symbolism. The term progress here does not necessarily imply any absolute advance either in truth or in literary art. A wider comparison with the development of thinkers and writers in other times will show the danger of such an assumption clearly enough. The direction of Milton's growth was an incident of his age and its changing cycles of philosophy. Had he lived in our day, he might very possibly have progressed in the reverse direction; for today we are returning to the standpoint of the Middle Ages, as in so many other things, so also in this matter of symbolism. The development of Ibsen, to mention a single example, was in this respect exactly opposite to Milton's. In earlier dramas such as *The Pretenders* and *The Enemy of the People,* he wrote parable plays, whereas during his last period he drew closer and closer to the morality in such plays as *The Masterbuilder* and *Little Eyolf.* The Ratwife, in the last named drama, is a thoroly medieval personification of Death.[28] After all, perhaps neither method of conveying spiritual truth has, in the last analysis, anything to do with the artistic greatness of a piece of literature, apt as the individual critic is to be prejudiced in favor of one or the other. Whatever the vehicle which the poet chooses, whether Platonic or Aristotelian, Realist or Nominalist, what really matters is the imaginative power that he puts behind it. The more glowing his poetic fire, the more truth he will be able to take up and fuse in his poetry. The real test is not the method by which he does it, but the amount of unfused, insoluble stuff that he leaves behind.

[28] The observation of Samuel Butler is interesting in this connection: " Science is being daily more and more personified and anthropomorphised into a god. By and by they will say that science took our nature upon him, and sent down his only begotten son, Charles Darwin, or Huxley, into the world so that those who believe in him, etc.; and they will burn people for saying that science, after all, is only an expression for our ignorance of our own ignorance " (*Notebooks,* p. 339).

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